

Ministerial training: The need for pedagogies of formation and of contextualisation in theological education

Marilyn Naidoo*

Abstract

Developing the next generation of competent Christian leaders with vision and character for the new millennium remains a major concern in church and society. This article explains how and why, within the theological curriculum, pedagogies of formation and of contextualisation are critical to producing quality Christian workers who are grounded in their pastoral identity and have the necessary skills to be relevant to their communities. Pedagogies of formation relate to both aspects of spirituality and holiness and the profession of ministry. Practices of contextualisation should help students develop the skills of social and theological analyses, understand the nature of communities and their dynamics, and the means by which they can be transformed and adapted to social change. Intentionality about formation and contextualisation can provide the integration of learning that can narrow the gap between theological education and Christian practice.

Keywords ministerial training, theological education, contextualisation, pastoral formation, church leadership

Christian theological education is an enterprise which is particularly wide-ranging in its scope and its efficacy. The purpose of theological education is essentially the equipping of men and women for appropriate leadership and ministry within churches and associate institutions. While ministerial skills are important for church workers to possess, many have reached their ministerial posts with a great deal of intellectual knowledge and yet with little practical understanding of how to lead and administer the church population (Scalise 2003). This lack of continuity between what theological students are learning in the classroom and what they need to know once they enter the ministerial context is a source of concern (Banks 1999, Cannell 2006, Foster, Dahill, Golemon & Tolentino 2006).

A major charge of the current model of theological education is that graduates are not sufficiently aware of who they are and do not know how to be relevant to their context (Warford 2007:161, Hodge & Wenger 2005; 34). A key shortcoming is a lack of attention to pedagogies of formation and contextualisation, that is, teaching that attends to social identity and social location. Teaching practices are the fundamental processes by which we learn and become who we are. Pedagogies of formation involve the integrated development of knowledge and spirituality, identity and integrity

* Dr Marilyn Naidoo teaches at the University of South Africa at the Department of Practical Theology. She can be reached naidom2@unisa.ac.za.

in the professional formation of clergy. Pedagogies of contextualisation have to do with grounding pedagogies of formation in the interplay of historical and contemporary contextual influences. Pedagogies here refer to those deep structures of teaching practices that connect the practice, the conceptual, social and ideological aspects of student preparation for ministry (Lave & Wenger 1991:54).

It should be noted that, while the church is growing most rapidly in the non-Western world, most theological reflection remains captive to a Western model of theologising. In our African context the prevailing paradigm of theological education, and even current proposals for its reform, exist within a Western frame of reference which is fundamentally flawed (Mugambi 1995:3). Most theological institutions reflect the tension between African communal culture and the tendencies to isolation, individualism, and competition. The diet has been prepacked theologies, ethical systems and pastoral methods all imported from the West (Mugambi 1995:8). The growth of the church in Africa is so enormous that the need for leaders far outstrips the ability of Bible and theological institutions, seminaries and correspondence programmes to supply them (Lucas 1990: 91, Johnstone 1995:38). Added to this, many theological institutions have been passive rather than proactive and intentional about spiritual and character development (Naidoo 2008). For a Christian, moral formation is an aspect of spiritual formation; spiritual maturity results in moral formation and committed discipleship (Kinoti 1999). Therefore the quality of leaders developed at theological institutions must have consequences for the broader community. Kretzschmar asks the question, “Does the African church have the moral stature, spiritual discernment, managerial competence to contribute to the liberation and reconstruction of the continent?”(2006:349).

The challenge of educating ministers is still about developing ways of helping students strengthen the fragile connections between theory and practice, among the disparate aspects of themselves and between themselves and their various circles of accountability and ministry. This article will start by discussing the challenges of the current paradigm of theological education and then expand on the significance of pedagogies of formation and of contextualisation in constructing a curriculum for ministerial training.

The predominant paradigm for theological education

There are several models of theological education that are recognisable, for example, Sidney Rooy (1988) has identified and analysed four “theological cultures”, derived from contextual forces that have influenced theology and the church in certain historical periods in the two millennia since the

formation of the Christian church. These would include the catechetical, the monastic, the scholastic and the seminary models. Grahame Cheesman (1993) has identified five dominant paradigms in contemporary theological education: the academic, monastic, training, business and discipleship paradigms. Robert Banks (1999) has described two major positions in the current debate on theological education (more specifically in the North American context) as the “classical” and “vocational” models.

From the range of models available it is the scholastic or seminary model which is recognised as appropriate by the majority of Protestant theological institutions worldwide (Cannell 2006). The standard framework for theological education is the fourfold theological encyclopedia of biblical studies, systematic theology, church history and practical theology (Farley 1983). The academic pattern, drawn from the university model continues to be departmentalisation with further specialisation within those departments. The reason for the fragmentation and isolation of disciplines has been a subject of concern in the literature for several years (Farley 1983; Wood 1985; Stackhouse 1988; Kelsey 1993, Banks 1999). The scholastic method shaped by the Enlightenment has resulted in the study of theology becoming a science supporting the professionalisation of the ministry. Farley (1983) attributed this situation to the fragmentation of a formerly unified theology.

Theological institutions heavily emphasise learning that takes place in the classroom, and are focused on knowledge production (Cannell 2006). In some instances knowledge is seen as an objective body of information, doctrine and or the Christian tradition transmitted to students. In other instances, knowledge is synonymous with wisdom (Farley 1983, Wood 1985). Embedded in the process of scholastic learning is field education or supervised ministry with a view to providing students with the necessary skills they will be assuming in ministry. This could involve case studies, internships and practical exposures to ministry. These are generally designed to act as a bridge between the theological institution and the church. It involves a twofold charge: to assess the integrity of a student's calling to ministry and to facilitate the professional readiness of the student (Paver 2006). The other significant dimension of ministerial formation is spiritual formation. In the average Protestant theological institution, spiritual formation is now becoming an important area of the mandate but how to meet that need is still a matter of debate (Cannell 2006: 35-43; Banks 1999:1-13; Foster et al. 2006:101,274). Disputed issues include the theological and educational status of the field of spiritual formation and the form that spiritual formation might take within a programme of studies (Liefeld & Cannell 1991:244; Reisz 2003:29-40). In theological institutions then, the training of ministers involves the cognitive acquisition of appropriate knowledge, competence in required ministerial skill and personal character development.

Invariably pressure comes from stakeholders of the enterprise to give greater emphasis to one or another dimension of training as, in reality, the dominant structure of many seminaries tends to favour academic instruction, tolerate the practical and compartmentalise the spiritual (Liefeld & Cannell 1991:244; Reisz 2003:29-40). Faculty members of theological institutions are well aware of the difficulty of balancing these dimensions within their curriculum (Banks 1999:1-13; Foster et al. 2006:101,274). In part, expectations are unrealistic because stakeholders fail to realise that theological education is a lifelong process and a theological institution can only engage in part of that endeavour. Nevertheless this should not rule out an informed critique of the efficacy of theological institutions according to their stated purposes.

The tenor of much of the literature on theological education suggests that the stakeholders express dissatisfaction with institutionally based theological education in the following ways:

- From the perspective of the students, many leave theological institutions dissatisfied with their experience. Although both anecdotal and empirical evidence identifies a significant number who move into ministerial settings enthusiastically, they soon discover that they lack some or even the most rudimentary qualifications for effective ministry (Scalise 2003, Jones and Armstrong 2006, Mead 2005)
- From the perspective of recipient churches and organisations, many perceive theological institutions as “ivory towers” (Cheesman 1993:484, Cannell 2006:8) or as producing graduates who need to be re-tooled to be of value to the recipient institution.
- From the perspective of lay people there is always ambivalence towards seminary graduates. On the one hand, there is a sense that the graduates deserve to be placed on some sort of ecclesiastical pedestal because of their theological education while, on the other hand, they wonder whether the same graduates fail to understand the reality of life in their societies; it is as if they graduate with the right answers but to the wrong questions (Mead 2005).

To address such criticisms, consideration must be given to the reasons why the predominant paradigm of Protestant theological education militates against its efficacy. The most pressing challenge affecting theological education is the consensus of contemporary literature that theological education is in a crisis (Cannell 2006: 35-43). Concerns about the state of theological education persist: the curriculum is specialised and fragmented, thus hindering the equipping of leaders; a coherent purpose and compelling vision for theological education are lacking; historically, the effort to integrate the curriculum around theology has been lost; theology itself is

undefined, fragmented, rationalised and specialised; theory and practice are in perpetual tension; and education is not sufficiently concerned with learning (Banks 1999:1-13; Cannell 2006: 35-43; Paver 2006:7-15). The analysis of the problem is that theological institutions have failed to produce the desired product, a skilled leader, or that the purpose of theology is not understood¹ and therefore the theological curriculum is in disarray with minimal integration among the disciplines and a tendency to functionalism.²

For many years theological education functioned as an industry concerned with the economics of human and knowledge products from institutions that were more like factories than centres of learning (Scalise 2003). Many pastors and denominational leaders have asked whether seminaries provide their graduates with the kind of knowledge and expertise that they need to fulfil their ministerial responsibilities (Foster 2006). There is much talk about the widening gap between the theological institutions and the church, part of it stemming from the fact that these days fewer faculties have ministerial experience. Today many churches, frustrated with the graduates of theological schools are challenging existing systems and joining their efforts to find new models like church-based theological education for the training of their ministers (Jones and Armstrong 2006:111). Many theological institutions worried about economic survival and desiring to meet what are perceived as the current needs of the church and society have spawned a variety of emphases and new degree programmes, formed partnerships and established institutes to do what the traditional curriculum seemed unable to do (Cannell 2006: 36-37).

It is entirely possible that Christianity in the West may have overemphasised formal education because it yields curricula insensitive to contextual needs of Africa, curricula that produce decontextualised thinkers and theologians (Gustafson 1988). Theological education must involve training and equipping pastoral leaders to do theology by involvement at the grassroots level and developing responsiveness to that level. Informal and

¹ The literature presents various perspectives on the purpose of theological education: nature and reform of theology to restore the unity of theology (Farley 1983); the mission and purpose of the church (Hough and Cobb 1985); the development of vision and discernment in theology (Wood 1985); professional image of ministry (Glasse 1988); ; pluralism and globalisation facing church leaders (Stackhouse 1988); the nature of Christian witness (Kelsey 1992) and the missional model (Banks 1999).

² Farley's *Theologia* (1983: 29-124) argues that the standard theological curriculum is a haphazard collection of studies handed down from earlier periods and now entrenched in separate academic guilds. The pieces cannot be fit together from any vantage point because the disciplines we have now were never part of the larger whole in the first place. What once held theological study together has been lost, that is *theologia* (a sapiential knowledge of God which disposes the knower to God and deeply informs the knower for Christian life and ministry). Theology as "habitus of wisdom" has shifted to "clerical paradigm."

nonformal theological education is seen as the most effective for the African context since it is appropriate to the life of the community (Erny 1981; Irele 1992), involves vernacular materials and accesses oral traditions.

Theological institutions that are connected to churches and denominations need to rethink and refocus their educational programme and make a more concerted effort to educate future leaders who will make a difference. In doing so, they need to examine not only the model of theological education but also the product of theological education. Essentially theological institutions and seminaries are responsible for preparing wise, compassionate theologically astute and pastorally proficient servants who can lead the church and society. Learning to be a minister encompasses the holistic development of individuals rather than being limited to either the acquisition of knowledge about the faith or even knowing how to behave as a minister. The acquisition of knowledge is essential in ministerial formation but the scope of education must go beyond a restrictive cognitive qualification to more integrated human development. This is one of the main reasons why pedagogies of formation need to play a significant role in theological education.

Pedagogies of formation in theological education

Interest in pedagogies of formation has grown in recent years. The most obvious need is the preparation and shaping of future church leaders.

The attention given to pedagogies of formation by theology educators may be one of the most distinctive features found in the training of clergy. Ministers arrive at an understanding of their role through the complex interrelationship of responses from others, inherited and perceived role models, peer group influence, congregational, community, institutional role expectancy and professional training. The influence of the training experience is especially a key factor in determining role understanding and ministerial practice, effectiveness and “success”. This process of equipping is termed *pedagogies of formation*: the provision of what is needed to form theological students into people with the blend of qualities appropriate to enabling them to work effectively in their communities (Harkness 2001:141).

Pedagogies of formation distinctively influence how theology educators configure the elements of ministerial education to account for the integration of the cognitive, practical and professional apprenticeships in educating clergy.

In this regard Theology graduates are supposed to *know* some important things about the tradition, to *do* those tasks required in the ministry of the church and to *be* persons of faith. Each of these three dimensions is informed by explicit or implicit theological understandings of

the nature of humans, of ministry, of leadership and of context and diversity. In the light of this, ministerial training involves more than teaching students a particular way of thinking; it requires those ways of thinking to be linked constructively with ways of being and doing.

It is important to acknowledge that not everyone is convinced about the central role of formation or its place in theological education. As Charles Foster (2006: 68) notes, there are three overall categories of objections to notions of formation:

- an implication that students are “passive and more or less infinitely malleable, plastic to the will or power of some superior shaping force”
- a concern about “spiritual formation” and who is responsible for this in seminary education including questions of hierarchy, potential abuses of power, competency and training
- an assumption that a “preordained pattern” or “form” exists to which the most diverse human sensibilities and personalities must somehow be “conformed”

For our African context other challenges could include concerns of how to reconcile formation as a corporate term with the functional, individualistic cast of theological curricula and outcomes (Ekwunife 1997:203). Attempting formation in an intercultural community has its challenges of ethnocentrism and prejudice, and formation processes must take the personal and contextual into account with equal seriousness (Linder 1997). While not wanting to dismiss the concept of formation because it is too problematic, a more self-critical approach to formation recognises that, whether it is intentional or not, formation occurs inside and outside formal education. What is true is that students who end up in seminary arrive already formed by a variety of life experiences and popular culture and have internalised views on race, gender, social and economic class and religious diversity. Similarly, when they leave these institutions they will have other experiences that will continue to impact on their formation.

The unique character of the pastoral profession

In focusing on pedagogies of formation, it is important to start by considering the unique character of the pastoral profession as it impacts on the end product of theological education.

Firstly, an essential – and its most distinctive – capacity of church leadership is facility with the spiritual dimension of human life and experience. Church leaders are routinely expected to exercise this capacity in ordinary actions and rituals: teaching, preaching, leading liturgy and even conversing. In dealing with people’s questions, fears and hopes about the ultimate meaning of their lives and experiences, church leaders require sensitivity and skill. They must sense which aspects of their religious

tradition might best provide resources for healing or liberating; they must know how to be prophetic in given situations and how to frame appropriate responses to changing situations and circumstances in congregations and communities (Jones 2002).

Secondly, theological students need to become aware that ministry in the form of ministerial leadership is a public not a private role and, consequently, students must be attuned to the behaviour and accountability required of those who enjoy the community's trust. One might identify a number of relatively distinct needs relating to this. Ministers and those in similar positions of leadership need to know themselves well (Conn 1994:23). Leadership in general is full of temptations. The professional roles occupied by such church leaders in our society give ample opportunity for various kinds of abuse. Self-deception, as well as the deception of others, is an easy and attractive feature of religious leadership. Misuse of time and resources, manipulation of others by means of one's professional knowledge and power and other forms of depravity are possible. These are also often subtly encouraged by the social arrangements in which leaders find themselves and the psychological dynamics of the situation (Conn 1994:23).

Thirdly, the unique characteristic of the pastoral profession involves the identity of the pastor, which applies to the person and the competence of the pastor which, in turn, involves the profession of the person. Identity refers to a sense of personal wholeness and there are distinctions between personal identity, pastoral identity and theological identity (Heitink 1993:311). Two questions are important in this connection: Who am I? What am I supposed to do? Heitink cautions that one must realise that the three states of existence – being simultaneously a pastor, a believer and a human being, constantly interact as stimuli and obstructions while external factors of a social or theological nature may add to the crisis (Heitink 1993:312). The other important component is that of competence. Heitink differentiates between two meanings of the term "competence": first, being authorised by the church and tradition and secondly having certain skills such as pastoral-theological skills, communicative skills and personal skills (1993:312-313). These distinctions show the connection between authorisation by the clergy and competence focused on the integration of calling and profession, person and church office, knowledge and skill.

There will be particular demands upon the leader's spirituality and competence. As teachers of the tradition, leaders are expected to know what they are speaking about, and this demands some sort of internalisation of the tradition and competence at living on its resources (Rice 1998:34-35). If they are to provide leadership to congregations and individuals under all sorts of conditions, they must understand human behaviour in health and

adversity. This requires some degree of psychological, anthropological and sociological understanding, as well as a theological grasp of the human condition before God (Van der Ven 1998:171). It also requires insight and penetration and a multitude of other personal qualities, which finally rest upon one's self-knowledge and on the character of one's spiritual life. Students preparing for such work must be well acquainted with their own strengths and weaknesses when faced by such challenges, and with the opportunities that these afford for genuine and effective service.

Much of the concerns about ministerial training for clergy are indicative of attempts to define ministry in terms of what the minister does rather than what a minister is (Scalise 2003). Central to the issues of training are those of role and ministerial identity for, if people have not come to terms with who they are as individuals, then no amount of preparation and training will help. Instead it will underlie their inadequacy, ineffectiveness and incompetence and lack of proper place. It is only when pastors function out of their identity in Christ that they know how to survive the conflicts and confusions of church life. A number of writers have highlighted the fact that one of the primary weaknesses of theological education is the lack of training in terms of self-development (Conn 1994; Francis & Jones 1996; Warford 2007, Jones 2002). Seminaries are becoming increasingly concerned about the personal functioning of future Christian leaders. This concern is related to reports that interpersonal and relational deficits are associated with the vast majority of psychological and spiritual problems faced by pastors – issues that consequently need to be addressed (Hall 1997).

Formative practices within the theological curriculum

Pedagogies of formation foster the professional identity and integrity that function as a lens or framework through which students view and appropriate knowledge and skills associated with the work of the profession.

Spirituality has often been assumed to be part of formation for Christian leadership. Theology educators, for example, often assume that persons have been shaped and formed in the context of the local church and have developed their spirituality before arriving at seminary but this may not be the case. Students assume theological institutions will deepen their spiritual formation and are sometimes disappointed to discover that theological education is a spiritual endeavour unlike anything they may have experienced earlier in their lives (Cetuk 1998). Likewise, local churches assume that theological institutions will teach church leaders about spirituality in ways that deepen their students' faith. Such assumptions often result in disappointments for everyone engaged in the development of Christian leaders (Cetuk 1998).

Formative practices that focus on spirituality in theological education and in the church need to be crafted towards developing Christian leaders whose spiritual life and practice articulate the same intentions in Christian ministry (Lamoureux 1999). Formative practices within spiritual formation could include academic courses on spirituality, instruction in personal spiritual disciplines, community life interaction, classroom teaching, spiritual direction or devotional services. In the classroom, for example, spiritual formation will not be the explicit agenda of many of the courses because it is more easily approached indirectly than directly. But in certain ways even the predominant mood, the learning climate and the relationship between teachers and students contribute to the overall spiritual formation process and can have deep consequences for personal and communal spirituality. How teachers teach may be just as crucial in the formative process as what they teach (Johnson 1989:135). Attention should also be given to the hidden curriculum (Pazmino 1992:93) which affects trust and mistrust and openness or closeness in a classroom community.

Many aspects of students' social identity, for example, being a woman, being black, being married to a nonbeliever and so on, can shape the transition from the world of graduate studies to the world of congregational ministry. Some new ministers face challenges in constructing an identity or a public persona of being a minister and this could have a negative outcome in the form of anxiety or depression under stress. Pedagogies of formation can foster self-reflection on aspects of social identity and students are given many opportunities to think about how their gender, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation inform the transition from seminary to ministry. Formative practices can also teach ways of coping with stress: spiritual practices are an important dimension of this. Students need also to reflect on how their social identity and areas of psychological vulnerability shape this transition. The more students are able to draw connections between theological studies and the practice of ministry, the more they will be able to achieve. Much of the legitimate criticism of theological institutions' spiritual aridity (Reisz 2003:30) will be dissipated when educators can become intentional about creating "safe spaces" to help students explore issues of their own faith formation and spiritual lives in tandem with their academic work. When spiritual practices fostered in the above ways reinforce one another, they contribute to ministerial identity in a more natural way.

Another area of intention relates to the development of the professionalisation of ministry. This is a concept that carries many multiple possibilities and problems (Farley 1983; Glasse 1988; Banks 1999, Cannell 2006). The understanding that ministry is something one "is" rather than what one "does" is still important and moves one beyond profession to vocation. In contemporary culture there is a diversity of opinion about how

one understands ministry as an occupation or a profession. Carroll (2006) suggests three models: pastoral leadership as an office, ordained ministry as a profession and ministry as a calling (drawing on H. Richard Niebuhr). Heitink (1993) distinguishes between three approaches in the pastoral profession: the ecclesiastical character, the professional character and the personal character. Here again, the particularity of theological commitments need to be reflected in the development of formative practices. For example, a tradition that focuses more clearly on pastoral leadership as an office might be invested in formative practices that help persons intentionally reflect on what it means to be a professional in this way, while another denomination that focuses on ministry as calling might craft very different kinds of formative practices.

Those engaged in crafting formative practices for religious leadership need to invite students, religious leaders, church members and others into the reflective practice of pondering how theology informs their notions of spirituality and professional identity (Jones 2006). Moving too quickly over the theological commitments of particular communities of faith and denominations can result in missing some of the nuances and differences that make for a richer vision of religious leadership. Theology educators should also encourage the development of lifelong formative practices that acknowledge the ever-unfolding process of formation (Harkness 2001). Formation cannot be accomplished in either formal or informal theological education alone but must be part of the broader landscape of practices that help craft a religious leader's sense of vocation, awareness of God and theological conviction (Warford 2007). Ultimately formative practices, such as spirituality and professionalisation, will assist in the development of patterns of living and being that sustain and nurture a deeper capacity for faithful leadership throughout one's ministry.

The importance of pedagogies of formation

The growing interest in formation impacts on other needs within the theological institution. In recent years even denominational theological institutions can no longer guarantee that new students are already being formed within a particular religious tradition or culture (Senior & Weber 1994:30). The dislocation of traditional family life and the decline in church participation among many young people, particularly in mainline denominations, results in many students having little or no sense of the history, customs and ethos of the religious communities they feel called to serve and lead. It becomes increasingly difficult to shape such a person's identity because church and faith are less and less evident in our society and the traditional landmarks of clergy, tradition and roles are no longer self-evident.

Also, because of the changing demographics of student bodies (Jones & Armstrong 2006) many candidates for ministry are older students, who bring a potential for increasing maturity and the possibility of a longer, more complex web of personal experiences and psychological baggage. These students also bring with them some of the marks of current culture: unstable, broken families, experimentation with alcohol, drugs and sexuality; the strengths and weakness of living in a materialistic, competitive and highly individualistic culture; and so on. These facts have been documented in recent studies (Larsen & Shopshire 1988; Hemrich & Walsh 1993). Theological institutions are thus being forced to do what used to be done in other places by other people. The theological institution cannot be a substitute for the family, the clinic or the church itself. Nevertheless, it may have to take some increasing responsibility for the personal and spiritual development of the student it is preparing for public ministry.

Ministerial formation is more urgent than it used to be because of the growing awareness of professional misconduct by some clergy. Many people in churches hold theological institutions at least in part responsible for such scandalous failures. They demand that institutions do a better job of screening clergy candidates and give more priority to the teaching of ethical values in their curricula. Such criticisms raise the issue of standards for admission and readiness for ministry. For example in the United States, member schools of the Association of Theology Schools (ATS) for example, have been sued over the misconduct of their graduates (Senior & Weber 1994:32).

Within the African context plagued by manifold social problems, dire poverty and the abuse of power, authoritarian religion and the “prosperity” gospel are popular responses. Even though the church is well represented in all the sub-Saharan countries, its moral influence within these countries has often been muted or largely absent (Kretzschmar 2004).

The issue of identity relates to ministerial formation. Bediako explains that, even before the period of colonial expansion and missionary engagement, the identity of the African was seen as that of a slave and theories of racial hierarchy relegated the African to the bottom of the scale (July 1968:213). As it emerged in the post-missionary context of African Christianity in the late 1950s and 1960s, the question of identity entailed confronting not only the problem of how “old” and “new” in the African religious consciousness but also how it could become integrated in a unified vision of what it meant to be Christian and African (Hastings 1976:50). Bediako (1992, 1994:15) asserts, “The issue of identity lies at the heart of the processes by which the Christian theological enterprise is carried forward.” Irele (1992) suggests that a marred identity needs to be

theologically reconstructed. Ministerial formation should help leaders discover and construct their identity so that they may develop the Christian identity of the congregations they lead (Gustafson 1988:20).

Pedagogies of Contextualisation

Pedagogies of contextualisation emphasise that clergy practice is itself socially situated: each sermon, each ritual and each professional action is both influenced by and shapes a particular congregation in a given location in a specific cultural setting (Foster et al. 2006). Contextualisation is another important area within theological education that enables the production of quality ministers and involves reflection on both the biblical-theological-historical “text” and our present cultural-social “context.”

Contextualisation as a discipline refers to the essential nature of the gospel, its cross-cultural communication and the development and fostering of local theologies and indigenous church forms (Haleblian 1983: 97). Although definitions of this word vary, “contextualisation” in this article refers to the task of making explicit the socially situated nature of all knowledge and practice (Schreiter 1985:1).

For several decades theology educators have worked to establish the best models for educating ministries. In the 1970s and 1980s, educators asked questions about the gulf between theory and practice; how best to integrate theology and ministry; and how to help students know how congregations work (Cannell 2006: 6). In the recent past, theology educators have grown increasingly concerned about the social and cultural context in which ministry takes place, especially in relation to the changing role of religion in society and the emerging multiplicity of cultures and diversity of ethnic communities (Foster 2006). Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989: 28-29) state that the education of ministers for the Two-Thirds World should address the issues of social justice and human development and the dialectic between local culture and religious situations and universal technological civilisation.

In our African context, many theological institutions have adopted the Western model and are challenged to find the most appropriate training for their own ministerial students. This is one of the reasons why students from this part of the world who attend Western theological institutions overseas often do not return home or, if they do return, find it hard to operate in a culturally effective way. It is indeed regrettable that the curriculum in theological institutions does not include more relevant courses such as socioeconomic development, African biblical and cultural hermeneutics, gender and theology, peace building and ecumenical studies, to name a few.

In recent years theology educators have realised the need to take African culture seriously in order to produce a relevant theology for the

African people (Bediako 1984, Tienou 1984). John Pobee notes that “the task is to develop an authentically African expression of the one gospel... expressing the one gospel in such a way that not only will Africans see and understand it but also non-Africans will see themselves as sharing a common heritage with Africans” (1996:49). Bediako states that, despite the initial missionary encounters being traumatic events for traditional African cultures, the dynamic interaction of the gospel with African culture was deep and abiding, eventually resulting in a significant, indigenous reassessment of the received gospel message (Sanneh 1983). Bediako notes that this search actually constituted a new theological methodology, the “hermeneutic of identity” (1994:16) not sourced in a Western-dominated model of theological engagement but in a genuinely biblical encounter with their religious past (1994).

This theme of understanding African Christian identity against the background of the essential nature of African primal religions has given rise to some voices pleading for a more indigenous form of theological education (Nthamburi & Waruta 1997:40). Others have looked to a more culturally sensitive, biblically orientated model (Fiedler, Gundani & Mijoga 1998). This has come to be known as incarnational theology, African Christian theology, inculturation theology or contextual theology (Amanze 2009:125). The idea is that, for it to be truly African, the church needs to become African in belief, theology and practice.

The theology taught in African theological institutions must give attention to the historical, biblical and pastoral dimensions within their context in order to have relevance. It begins when theology education develops contextual approaches and hermeneutical methods like the hermeneutics of inculturation or liberation (Kiogora 1998) based on the way African people conceive and interpret reality. It must be supported by tools from African culture like language, art, oral traditions and an African worldview (Bediako 1992). There must be a rediscovery, appreciation and mature re-appropriation (Maluleke 1996:19) of inherent traditional African values and responses to education.

Contextualisation practices within the curriculum

The education of clergy needs to engage the pedagogies of contextualisation that heighten student awareness of the dynamic character of the content and agency of contexts. The contextual approach as an interpretive paradigm is a refined form of the “application” stage of reading a text. It insists on the text being read and interpreted against the background of the interpreting context as well as in the order of concerns that arise from the context. The difference between it as a method and current practice of “contextualisation” is that it is not appended to the end of an “exegetical exercise”; it is the manner of

reading the text from the beginning to the end, with some help from the insights of conventional exegetical methods (Speckman 2007:60).

Contexts as settings of human interaction have content. Contexts consist of patterns of relationship and social structures, historical trajectories and local particularities, status and power configurations, values and commitments that intrigue contemporary social analysis (Gumperz 1992:44). Bernard Meland has described contexts as structures of experience (1972:99). Just as pertinent pedagogically, contexts also have agency. An emphasis on contextual agency originates in the recognition that, just as the structure and placement of words in a paragraph influence the meaning of a sentence, contexts of human activity also influence and shape what we think, how we perceive and why we act as we do (Meland 1972:99). More attention is paid to how contextual circumstances shape the messages they seek to communicate just as, even, Western theology, has sociocultural bias like any other. Meaning and identity are always contextual and content is hidden unless contexts become accessible to critique and open to transformation.

Robert Schreiter (1985) identifies “new questions” that Christian leaders are being asked, questions to which there are no ready traditional answers. The consequence, Schreiter suggests, is that theologies once thought to have “a universal or perennial character” are often now seen as being “regional expressions of certain cultures” (1985:3). The new presence of minorities, women and the poor, together with a consciousness of historical and social pluralism has also given rise to questions about the inadequacy of overarching philosophical or theological systems. Contextual theologies deal with the explosion of local theologies coming from the Two-Thirds World that search for some understanding of the process, derivations and implications of these local theologies (Speckman & Kaufmann 2001:47,316-319). There is now the development of black, feminist, womanist, global and ecological theologies among Christians and a host of ethical perspectives – medical, legal, feminist and the like – to address issues that face clergy along with their colleagues in other professions. Douglas Hall envisions in these situations that every context holds its own distinctive problematic, requiring Christian leaders to ponder the continuity of their traditions in their contextual particularity (1991:38).

In educating clergy within the curriculum the first pedagogy of contextualisation seeks to develop in students a consciousness of context, its content and agency (Foster 2006: 132). Theology educators articulate this intention for students in many ways: to help students understand “the ways that educational structures, teaching relationships and processors of learning give shape to personal and communal experience” or to help them learn how to “think contextually” about the “theological task”. This involves helping students learn how to read the congregation and its history as context for

pastoral leadership. In our South African context for example, theology educators should emphasise issues of gender and race and challenge teaching tactics that minimise or ignore these questions and perspectives and promote pedagogies to engage students in analysing power dynamics in any social process.

The second pedagogy focuses attention on developing in students the ability to participate constructively in the encounter of texts. Elements of the curriculum should help students understand the nature of communities and their dynamics, and the means by which they can be transformed and adapted to social change.

Relevant contextual factors in Africa need to be effectively understood to connect need with solution. These include: socioeconomic dimensions of poverty; suffering and empowerment; the political dimensions of injustice and liberation; the cultural dimensions of worldview and traditional African leadership; and the anthropological dimensions of identity and unity.

The third pedagogy of context engages students in processes of social and systematic change in what might be called the transformation of contexts (Foster 2006: 132). Here educators help students become attuned to their own culture, bias, ministerial style, background, even their own relationships as they do social analysis in their ministries or develop increasing awareness of the politics of biblical interpretation, while learning at the same time to exegete texts from a feminist, womanist or African perspective for a concrete communal setting. These critical theories can engage students in activities focused on the systematic and social transformation of institutions or systems (Brown, Davaney & Tanner 2001). In critical pedagogy hard disciplinary theories give way to inter-disciplinarity and arising from this breakdown of the closed systems of analysis, as the way people think are bound up with power (Ward 2000).

In theological institutions pedagogies for contextual encounter are often most evident in courses designed to help students explore ways to communicate the Christian message to people in cultures where it is not familiar. Unfortunately in the West this led to an imperialism of past missionary activity. The emphasis is now on developing sufficient familiarity with the context of an “other” to enter it on the “other’s” terms, while at the same time learning to read and share scripture through the lens of the personal and cultural experience of the same “other” to the end that the “other” might discover the transforming power of the Gospel in his or her own context (Ziebertz 2008:67). Those who teach or evangelise, however, are not unchanged, they too learn in the process, to “see” the Gospel afresh from inside the perspective of those they have been teaching or evangelising. The goal here is not necessarily consensus but the interplay of mutual appreciation and mutual critique. This goal shifts the power dynamics in the

pedagogical interaction. Foster suggests that pedagogies of contextual encounter nurture the capacity for empathic consciousness facilitate mutual understanding and foster dialogical reciprocity (2006:144-145).

The importance of contextualization for pedagogies

Theology educators need to attend to context for good reason. Making the context of ministry a central focus of theological education allows integration to happen in a more natural way; theological issues and interpretation of the situation arise when practitioners and scholars think together about the context.

Usually theological education requires students to learn too much too soon. Its pressured approach leaves little time to think through and evaluate views of educators or to work out how and where to put ideas into practice in an effective way.

Pedagogies of contextualisation will enable graduates to co-construct visions of ministry with those in Christian leadership once they have learnt how to do social and theological analyses of congregations in both field education and ministry through peer consultation and with mentors. The more time spent immersed in the realities of congregational life and communities during theological education, the more this enhances vocational discernment. It allows students to encounter the realities, challenges and opportunities of ministry in a way classroom lectures cannot do. These rich learning experiences and mechanisms for reflecting are important for action-reflection learning.

To sustain critical attention to the pedagogical and theological depth of such apprenticeships would also require the development of learning communities where pastoral and lay leaders could collaborate across congregations in resourcing, evaluating and strengthening their programmes. It is not incidental that teaching hospitals are closely tied to medical schools, for both are recognised as domains of teaching and learning essential to the education and formation of doctors. With both educators and Christian leaders as conversation partners, students are able to see the intellectual dimensions of the practice of ministry and why the study of theology and pastoral practice are so essential. This actually sends students back to the classroom eager for more study. Pedagogies of contextualisation will help students develop a consciousness of context and help them become attuned to the differences between their social location and those of their congregants. The result is that graduates feel confident about having the skills to examine what practices help them understand community and grow in their sense of public theology.

Finally pedagogies of contextualisation make graduates aware for the need to transform societies (Brown et al. 2001). The primary focus of contextual transformation is to equip students with the knowledge, skills and

sensibilities for critical reflection and action in the classroom and for taking up the challenge of transforming the structures of racism, oppression or marginalisation they encounter beyond the classroom in their churches and communities. What we need in our time are pastoral leaders who can create, renovate, sustain and extend religious institutions.

Conclusion

Theological institutions are heavily criticised for the tendency to turn out graduates who are well skilled in the cognitive disciplines but essentially lacking when it comes to the skills necessary for ministerial practice. The gap between the world of graduate studies and the world of congregational ministry is wide. Every effective pastor struggles to hold the contemplative and active dimensions of his or her work. It would be helpful therefore if the development of this balance could begin at seminary. But more importantly, it makes sense to place the learning of theology into conversation with the actual doing of ministry even while the theology is being assimilated.

The greater the gap between academic and practical studies, the more students will need to seek out integrative experiences in the form of internship opportunities and mentoring both at the theological institution and in the first few years of ministry. This is why contextual education and formation are so critically important: they shape pastoral formation and vice versa. Ministerial formation takes place through the process of theological reflection and self-reflection during the course of engaging in ministry, especially as differences and similarities in their social identity and those of their congregants shape their ministry. Contextualisation can help educators develop a consciousness of context that helps them learn to think contextually about the theological task. At the same time, they seek to develop in their students the skills to contextualise core values and practices from their faith in order to transform oppressive or discriminating structures and relationships from the past.

This paper has shown that educators of clergy must instruct their students in the formation of their pastor identities, character formation and in the understanding of the complex social, political, personal and congregational conditions in which they are embedded. A healthy church depends on equipping and maturing leaders who can lead the church and their communities towards holistic transformation.

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